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ABSTRACT

This brief report summarizes a longer document with the same title. It reviews how college faculty are increasingly collaborating to do much of their work. It notes that the two principal forms of collaboration, teaching and research, are often distinctive arrangements depending on the field of study, institutional environment, and task requirements. However, controversy surrounds the use of collaboration efforts, mostly because of inequitable uses of power and influence by some team members, the loss of professional identity, and problems involving integrity. Listed are ways in which administrators can foster collaboration, such as in resource allocation; developing supportive policies rewarding collaborative efforts, both publicly and privately; and the removal of certain organizational barriers. Key steps in the collaborative process are typically: (1) choose colleagues or team members; (2) divide the labor; (3) establish work guidelines; and (4) terminate the collaboration. Finally, it is recommended that more qualitative and quantitative research be done in collaboration to help remove the myths about this process and enhance opportunities for a successful experience. Contains 12 references. (GLR)

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Faculty Collaboration: Enhancing the Quality of Scholarship and Teaching

by Ann E. Austin and Roger G. Baldwin

Faculty collaboration has grown dramatically over the course of this century. Conventional stereotypes, which convey the image of professors conducting research in the isolation of a laboratory or teaching alone in front of a room of passive students, overlook important aspects of modern academic life. Many professors now do much of their work—teaching, conducting research, and writing—in partnership with colleagues.

Faculty collaboration occurs in a variety of settings and takes different forms, depending on the nature of the collaborative team and the goals of its members. Essentially, faculty collaboration is a cooperative endeavor that involves common goals, coordinated effort, and outcomes or products for which the collaborators share responsibility and credit. This definition is broad and flexible, because faculty collaboration varies in numerous ways contingent upon whether the partnership is for teaching or research as well as on the participants' fields of specialization, institutions of employment, career stages, and a host of other factors.

Professors choose to work in concert with colleagues for numerous reasons. Many believe collaboration increases productivity, maintains motivation, and stimulates creativity and risk taking. It can maximize the use of limited resources and could enhance the quality of teaching and research. Sometimes complex problems accompany faculty collaboration, however, such as difficulty concerning evaluation and assigning credit for work produced in collaboration. Because of the increasing popularity of faculty collaboration and the complex questions it poses, the time is right for a comprehensive examination of this important topic.

Why Is Collaboration a Growing Trend?

The growth of collaboration is not limited to the academic sector. Indeed, higher education is in the midst of a larger movement that is sweeping across our society. For example, teaming is increasingly prevalent in business, health care, and public policy work. Turbulent environments, rapidly changing technologies, and increasingly specialized knowledge are some of the factors that are making collaboration more attractive to professors and society in general.

How Do Faculty Collaborate?

Fundamentally, faculty collaboration takes two principal forms—collaboration in research and collaboration in teaching. Considerable variation occurs within these two categories, however. Collaboration in research can vary on several dimensions, including its purpose, organizational structure, team composition, and duration. In "supplementary collaboration," for example, researchers divide tasks among distinctively qualified specialists and make separate contributions to a shared project. In "complementary collaboration," on the other hand, researchers with similar interests and qualifications work closely on all aspects of a joint endeavor (Smart and Bayer 1986).

Collaboration in teaching can differ along several dimensions as well. Various classification schemes divide team teaching according to the roles teachers play (specialist versus generalist, for example), the degree of hierarchy in the team structure (hierarchical versus interactive, for example), and the extent to which disciplinary perspectives are integrated or maintained as distinct in the teaching collaboration (Easterby-Smith and Olve 1984; Rinn and Weir 1984).

Collaborative practices differ considerably across fields. Collaboration is most common in "data disciplines" with development of strong paradigms (like physics or chemistry). Collaboration is less widely practiced in "word disciplines" (like sociology or political science) and is rare indeed in fields like philosophy or literature (Bayer and Smart 1988; Berelson 1960; Fox and Faver 1984).

What Are the Key Steps?

Although each collaborative arrangement is distinctive, collaboration generally follows a common pattern. Small-group theory helps to illuminate the dynamics of collaboration. For example, negotiated order theory (Gray 1989) sees collaboration as a process of negotiation among stake holders. This theory emphasizes the temporary and emergent nature of collaboration as participants work out the details of executing a shared project or activity. Although small-group models might label the steps in the collaborative process somewhat differently, each effective collaborative team must proceed through four basic stages: (1) choosing colleagues or team members, (2) dividing the labor, (3) establishing work guidelines, and (4) terminating a collaboration. The way collaborators execute each step influences the evolution and outcomes of the team's effort.

Why Is Faculty Collaboration Controversial?

Collaboration among faculty often raises issues of power, influence, professional identity, and integrity. Evaluating individual contributions to collaborative en-

deavors and allocating credit fairly among partners are difficult challenges that frequently plague collaborators. Exploitation of lower-status parties in collaborative groups (women, minorities, junior colleagues, students, for example) is another problem that sometimes results when academics pool their talents. Most professional societies and higher education institutions have not implemented policies for resolving complex problems that can result from teamwork. As collaboration becomes more standard in the academic profession, clear policies are needed to ensure that faculty derive the maximum benefit from working together.

What Recommendations Emerge from a Study of Collaboration among Faculty?

The growing trend toward collaboration has implications for faculty, administrators, and the general higher education community. Faculty who are accustomed to working alone should consider developing collaborative relationships. Carefully managed collaborative partnerships can enrich academic life. To be successful, collaborators must know the dynamics of the collaboration process and be prepared to cope with collaboration's challenges as well as reap its rewards.

Administrators have a key role to play in fostering effective collaboration. They can allocate discretionary resources and shape supportive policies to encourage faculty to work together. More important, administrators can stimulate collaborative work by recognizing and rewarding collaborative achievements in public and private ways. They can also promote teamwork by collaborating themselves in team teaching an occasional course or conducting research with faculty colleagues.

At present, many informal traditions and explicit policies (criteria for tenure and promotion, policies for merit pay, standards for faculty evaluation, for example) inhibit collaboration by faculty. If the higher education community wishes to encourage more faculty teamwork, some significant reforms will be needed. For example, as part of professional socialization, students should be introduced to the merits and processes of collaboration. Certainly, the frequently accepted idea that single-author publications are inherently more valuable than co-authored work should be reexamined. Breaking down the barriers that discourage collaboration by faculty is probably the most needed reform. By implementing supportive policies and creating organizational structures to facilitate collaboration across disciplinary and institutional boundaries, higher education could better reap the range of benefits that faculty collaboration promises.

What Questions Remain to Be Explored?

Many questions concerning faculty collaboration invite attention. Research that explores more deeply how the collaboration experience varies by discipline, type of institution, and career stage is needed. Studies specifically comparing the collaboration practices of genders and various ethnic groups would also enhance understanding of this complex phenomenon. More systematic research on the outcomes and benefits of collaboration is essential as well. Carefully crafted studies using qualitative and quantitative methodologies will help to eliminate myths about collaboration and enable faculty members to enter collaborative relationships armed with knowledge that will enhance their opportunities for a successful experience.

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